

TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY THE CLERK OF THE LEGISLATURE  
Transcriber's Office  
FLOOR DEBATE

March 29, 2001      LB 667

PRESIDENT MAURSTAD: Thank you, Mr. Clerk. Senator Schrock, you are recognized to open on LB 667.

SENATOR SCHROCK: Mr. Lieutenant Governor, members of the Legislature, this is a bill that I've spent a lot of time on. I think it's important for water policy in the state of Nebraska. I have held meetings throughout the Republican River basin in December, namely in the towns of Red Cloud, Alma, McCook, and Imperial. I have become increasingly concerned about the issue of new irrigation wells being drilled in that basin, considering the fact that Kansas has sued us for alleged overuse of water in the basin. Now, I'm not here to tell you whether I believe we've overused water in that basin or not, or whether Kansas is getting their fair share or not. It just seemed foolish to me for there to be a rush by farmers in that area of the state to be drilling new irrigation wells when that basin is a subject of litigation. What this bill says is that if Nebraska is the subject of litigation on water quantity from another state that the wells drilled after January 1, 2001, may be regulated differently by the natural resource districts in that basin. There are four natural resource districts involved: the Upper Republican, headquartered in Imperial; the Middle Republican, headquartered at Curtis; the Lower Republican, headquartered at Alma; and the Tri-Basin NRD, headquartered in Holdrege. All four NRDs have passed resolutions supporting LB 667. It is not without controversy in the Lower Republican NRD in my legislative district. The vote count the last time they decided was seven to three to support the basin. And I know of at least two individuals that are very unhappy with me for introducing and carrying this bill. But I think it's a prudent thing for us to do. And I think when it comes to regulating water in the state of Nebraska, those decisions should be left up to our natural resource districts. But I also feel we should give them the tools to do it. This does not affect replacement wells. It is an issue that the Natural Resources Committee has helped me on. And I believe most of...I believe the committee members are all supportive, although they've received a lot of phone calls. And so there's been some question as to whether this is good policy or not. I think it is good policy. And it gives the natural resource districts the option of treating those wells differently should they decide to regulate in the future. And